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Reflection Paper 3

Changing for the Better

CASA is an incredible organization. They work day in and day out to change the lives of children for the better. They truly believe in their mission of embracing the fragile innocence of children and saving them from the potential toxins of some family lives. However, in my past four months of being an intern at CASA in Providence, Rhode Island, I have noticed a few components of the company that could be changed to better accommodate the potential of the agency. The agency could benefit from a more structured program for interns as well as more allotted time for the Guardian ad Litem to spend with the children who are on their caseload. Also, the agency could prosper with a simple increase in ability to include each other. I have developed some new policies and procedure that would help the entire agency better themselves by the improvement of these three components.

The encouragement of interns in an agency is crucial because it is those interns who will carry on the longevity of the agency when the current professionals are no longer able to perform in their field. At CASA they are extremely accepting of the volunteer help from interested interns however the duties of the interns needs some sort of structure.

CASA legal interns are treated almost the same as CASA volunteers especially in the aspect of the training they receive. When I joined the agency, I was given a large binder full of a multitude of information about the agency. Since I was not 21 years of age, the minimum required age to be involved in the CASA volunteer program, I was simply asked to read the

manual on my own. Once I finished, my supervisor asked me if I had any questions and he answered a few of them in between his busy schedule. I strongly feel that a more structured and intensive intern training would truly benefit the agency and the future of the agency.

CASA should assign the intern to one attorney and if there is more than one intern, they should be assigned to different attorneys. Prior to assignment, CASA should require all the attorneys to attend training in anticipation of mentoring their intern. Training should consist of a basic breakdown of what the intern is responsible for while part of CASA, as well as specific duties that the attorney should allocate to the intern. While I was at CASA, I found that on Thursdays while I was in the office, there was not much for me to do, nor was there anyone to give me tasks. I understand that many of the aspects of CASA require specific training but even the things that may not require such prerequisites could be given to the intern as specific duties. The more responsibility given by the CASA attorneys to the intern would help alleviate some of the stress for the attorney as well as enhance the learning experience for the intern.

The second area in which CASA could improve is the amount of time the CASA Guardian ad Litem spends with the children they are responsible for. The more time that the Guardian ad Litem spends with children, the more passion they will be able to put forth into their work. There are many cases in which the attorney does not even get the opportunity to meet the child so they are unable to put a face to a name. I understand that this aspect of child visits falls mostly upon the responsibility of the social worker; however I feel that it is extremely important for the Guardian ad Litem to meet with the child because it would drastically enhance the benefit for the child.

The change that must be made in order to enforce the policy of spending more time with the children on the Guardian ad Litem's caseload would require fewer cases per attorney. Fewer

cases would allow for more “free” time in the attorney’s schedule which could be used for visits with each child or more attention to each case. This would be extremely difficult to enforce without the acquirement of more Guardian ad Litem to alleviate some of the case load per attorney. The average Guardian ad Litem takes on about 500 cases per year so if CASA hired at least one new Guardian ad Litem per already existing Guardian ad Litem and they split the 500 cases into 250 each, that would drastically impact the “free” time available to visit with children. The time that a Guardian ad Litem can spend with a child can truly enhance the experience for the betterment of their wellbeing.

The last thing that CASA could certainly benefit from is a stronger system of inclusivity within the office. I have observed a lot of “cliquing” within the agency itself. The social workers tend to connect very well with each other and they exude a vibe that is extremely exclusive. The Guardian ad Litem are extremely busy with all of their cases so they are almost antisocial because they spend most of their time in their office. The environment truly fosters this exclusivity in groups around the office and it is extremely difficult to communicate within the differing groups. It is also difficult to approach a group when something needs to be discussed because it is difficult to talk to someone in the group without the gossip from the other members in the group. I guess I assumed that adults especially in professional settings such as a government agency office would have matured past this high school or college mentality.

I am not quite sure what sort of policy would eliminate the exclusivity that is within the CASA office but it is inexcusable in my opinion. It also sets for a specific mentality for the interns who participate in the office. For example, I am a bit weary to intern at another office simply due to experience of immaturity I was shown from the CASA office. The prevalence of

exclusivity makes me wonder if that is how all offices operate and if that is the case, this may not be the field for me. Exclusivity in professional settings is inexcusable and must be eliminated.

CASA stands for a unique cause, the betterment of children's lives through powerful advocacy on their behalf. They are an incredible agency to intern with. However like any good agency, there are areas that could use a bit of improvement to better the potential of the agency. A more structured program for interns, more allotted time for the Guardian ad Litem interaction with children on their caseload and lastly, an increase in ability to include each other. The entire agency would benefit from the policies I proposed for these three components and could make the agency stronger.